

Message Text

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SUBJ: CREDENTIALS CEREMONY: MEETING WITH PRESIDENT BONGO MARCH 6

1. AMBASSADOR PRESENTED CREDENTIALS AT NOON MARCH 6 IN IMPRESSIVE CEREMONY AT RENOVATION PALACE. PRESIDENT BONGO WAS ACCOMPANIED BY SEVERAL MINISTERS AND MEMBERS OF PRESIDENCY STAFF: AMBASSADOR BY FIVE DIPLOMATS ON EMBASSY STAFF. FOLLOWING FORMAL CEREMONY, BONGO, DEPARTING FROM TRADITION, ASKED THAT DCM AND PAO BE PRESENT AT FIRST OFFICIAL DISCUSSION. BONGO WAS ANIMATED AND AMICABLE WITH CONVERSATION, WHICH LASTED OVER HALF-HOUR, RANGING OVER SERIES OF SUBJECT FROM US-GABONESE RELATIONS INCLUDING HIS FRIENDSHIP WITH PRESIDENT CARTER, SAO TOME, ZIMBABWE, NAMIBIA, THE HELICOPTER CRASH, DELIVERY OF V-150 ARMORED VEHICLES, AND US CULTURAL PROGRAM. BONGO'S POSITIONS AND SENTIMENTS REPRESENTED ALMOST NO DEPARTURE FROM THOSE PREVIOUSLY REPORTED BUT FOR THE RECORD ARE SUMMARIZED IN SUCCEEDING PARAGRAPHS.

2. US-GABONESE RELATIONS: AMBASSADOR EXPRESSED HIS APPRECIATION FOR GABONESE EFFORTS PERMIT HIM PRESENT CREDENTIALS SO SOON AFTER ARRIVAL. BONGO RESPONDED THAT NOTHING LESS COULD BE EXPECTED BETWEEN GOOD FRIENDS. HE
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STATED THAT US-GABONESE RELATIONS WERE EXCELLENT AS THEY HAD BEEN FOR THE LAST SEVERAL YEARS. BONGO ALLUDED TO US AMBASSADORS IN EARLY YEARS WHO HAD ATTEMPTED TO OPERATE IN "ESRARN STYLE" AND ADVISED THAT IN GABON IT PREFERABLE TO OPERATE IN AFRICAN MANNER. INSTEAD OF GOING OUT AND ASKING QUESTIONS IN TOWN, HE STATED, AMBASSADOR SHOULD SEEK HIM OUT PERSONALLY AND MADE POINT OF GIVING HIS PRIVATE TELEPHONE

NUMBER TO BE USED AT ANY TIME. TURNING TO FOREIGN MINISTER MARTIN BONGO, PRESIDENT BONGO SAID HIS CHIEF DIPLOMAT DID NOT ALWAYS APPRECIATE DIRECT PRESIDENCY INVOLVEMENT IN DIPLOMACY BUT THAT WAS HIS CONCERN, NOT OUR. IN SPEAKING OF HIS PERSONAL FRIENDSHIP FOR PRESIDENT CARTER, BONGO RECOUNTED HOW HE HAD GONE TO CAPITOL HILL FOLLOWING HIS NOVEMBER MEETING WITH CARTER TO HELP IN EDUCATING CONGRESSMEN ABOUT AFRICAN AFFAIRS.

3. LOST HELICOPTER: AMBASSADOR EXPRESSED HIS SYMPATHY OVER LOSS OF HELICOPTER WHICH WENT DOWN FEBRUARY 20. BONGO RESPONDED WITH EXPRESSION OF THANKS FOR US ASSISTANCE IN PROVIDING AIRCRAFT TO PARTICIPATE IN SEARCH STATING THAT HE PERSONALLY WAS DEEPLY TOUCHED BECAUSE HIS BROTHER-IN-LAW (DJOUE-DABANY) AND NEPHEW (SISTER'S SON) WERE ON BOARD. BONGO STATED THAT ALTHOUGH SEARCH OPERATION CONTINUED, HOPE FADING. HE SAID THAT GOG FOLLOWING EVERY LEAD AND MENTIONED RECENT REPORT THAT HAD PLACED CRASH IN EQUATORIAL GUINEA. GOG HAD SENT DELEGATION TO MALABO MARCH 3 WHICH TURNED UP NOTHING BUT OBTAINED PRESIDENT MASPR'S PROMISE THAT IF THE CRAFT WERE FOUND TO HAVE CRASHED IN EQUATORIAL GUIUA, IT WOULD BE RETURNED. BONGO ALSO CRITICIZED FRENCH HELICOPTERS, ESPECIALLY THE PUMA, WITH WHICH HE STATED GABONESE HAD HAD NOTHING BUT PROBLEMS, AND REQUESTED INFORMATION ABOUT AMERICAN MANUFACTURED HELICOPTERS (SEPTEL).

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4. GABON'S FRIENDS: BONGO THEN TURNED TO DCM AND ASKED IF V-150 ARMORED CARS COULD BE FLOWN TO GABON BY US AIRCRAFT AT GABONESE EXPENSE TO ARRIVE IN TIME FOR 12 MARCH PARADE (SEPTEL). HE STATED THAT IT WOULD BE GOOD FOR GABONESE TO SEE US MILITARY EQUIPMENT IN PARADE BECAUSE MOST OF WHAT THEY SAW WAS FRENCH. HE REMARKED THAT MATERIAL FROM GABON'S "FRIENDS"--FRANCE, UNITED STATES, FRG AND PRC-- SHOULD ALSO BE EVIDENCED. IN AN ASIDE HE REMARKED THAT SOVIETS HAD IN PAST OFFERED MILITARY ASSISTANCE BUT THAT HE WOULD NEVER ACCEPT IT.

5. SAO TOME AND PRINCIPE: SOVIET REFERENCE LED BONGO INTO DISCUSSION OF SITUATION ON SAO TOME AND PRINCIPE. THE SAO TOMEANS, HE SAID, WERE UNHAPPY UNDER PINTO DA COSTA'S REGIME. RECENTLY SEVERAL SAO TOMEANS FROM ARMED FORCES HAD FLED THE ISLAND TO TAKE REFUGE IN GABON BECAUSE OF THE DETERIORATING STP SITUATION WHICH WAS BROUGHT ABOUT BY DACOSTA'S RELIANCE ON THE SOVIETS AND CUBANS. BONGO WAS DERISIVE ABOUT GSTP APPEAL FOR ASSISTANCE TO THWART IMPENDING MERCERNARY ATTACK. THE CRISIS, HE SAID, WAS NOTHING MORE THAN STP SIGHTING OF US SHIPS WHICH HAD

COME TO VISIT GABON. BONGO DISPLAYED PIQUE THAT DESPITE PAST AND PRESENT GABONESE SUPPORT, GSTP SOMEHOW THOUGHT GABON WANTED ABSORB THE TWO ISLANDS. HE ASKED RHETORICALLY WHY HE NEEDED PROBLEMS FROM AN ADDITIONAL 70,000 SAO TOMEANS WHEN HE HAD ENOUGH OF HIS OWN IN THE INTERIOR.

6. SOUTHERN AFRICA: BONGO EXPOUNDED FAMILIAR POSITIONS ON ZIMBABWE AND NAMIBIAN PROBLEMS. HE REFERRED TO HIS MEETINGS WITH CARTER AND THEIR AGREEMENT THAT ALL PARTIES SHOULD CONTEST INTERNAL ELECTIONS. THE PATRIOTIC FRONT DID NOT WISH TO DO THIS, HE SPECULATED, BECAUSE THEY WOULD NOT OVERCOME BISHOP MUZOREWA'S DOMINANT POPULAR POSITION. WITHOUT GOING INTO DETAIL, BONGO MADE SIMILAR REMARK ABOUT CONFIDENTIAL

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INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL SWAPO IN NAMIBIA.

7. AMERICAN CULTURAL CENTER: BONGO MADE SEVERAL FLATTERING REMARKS ABOUT PAO STEPHERSON'S PROGRAM AT VARIOUS POINTS THOUGHOUT SESSION. HE NOTED THAT THREE YEARS AGO THE ENGLISH-LANGUAGE PROGRAM HAD ONLY FIVE STUDENTS COMPARED TO MORE THAN 100 CURRENTLY ENROLLED. BONGO SUGGESTED THAT WE SET UP FULL TIME ENGLISH LANGUAGE TRAINING CENTER IN GABON REMARKING THAT HIS SOM (ALI BEN BONGO) INSISTED ON SPEAKING "AMERICAN" AS OPPOSED TO "ENGLISH." TIENKEN

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